

IN THE CLAIMS

Claim 1 (original): A pair of underpants comprising a front part (1,32), a back part, a crotch part (2,34) and two leg holes (3) delimited by the parts, and connecting means (4,30, 31) for connecting the crotch part (2,34) to the front part (1,32) and allowing an opening to be formed in the crotch area, said releasable connecting means (4,30, 31) extending from one leg hole (3) to the other and comprising two parts one overlapping the other in the closed condition characterized in that ends (6) of a part of said connecting means (4,30, 31) are provided with flexible protection means (5, 11,21, 33).

Claim 2 (original): A pair of underpants according to claim 1, wherein the opening to be formed in the crotch area includes the leg holes (3).

Claim 3 (currently amended): A pair of underpants according to claim 1 ~~or 2~~, wherein the flexible protection means (5,11, 21,33) are placed on the outer overlapping part of the releasable connecting means (4,30, 31).

Claim 4 (currently amended): A pair of underpants according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 3~~ claim 1, wherein the flexible protection means (5,11, 21,33) are made of cotton, nylon or any other material suitable for straps or tapes, being relatively and having a soft feel.

Claim 5 (currently amended): A pair of underpants according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 4~~ claim 1, wherein the flexible protection means (5,11, 21,33) are in the form of ribbons.

Claim 6 (original): A pair of underpants according to claim 5 wherein the ribbons have a length of about 15 to about 120 mm.

Claim 7 (currently amended): A pair of underpants according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 4~~ claim 1, wherein the flexible protection means (11,21, 33) are in the form of loops (12).

Claim 8 (original): A pair of underpants according to claim 7 wherein the loops have a length of about 95 to about 160 mm enabling the loop to hold diameters from about 30 to about 50 mm.

Claim 9 (currently amended): A pair of underpants according to ~~any one of claims 1 or 8~~ claim 1, wherein the flexible protection means (5,11, 21,33) have a width sufficient to cover the whole edge (6) of the releasable connecting means (4,30, 31).